

Statement of Congresswoman Juanita Millender-McDonald  
before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
"Equality for Filipino Veterans of World War II"  
February 15, 2007  
334 Cannon House Office Building, 10:00am

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the privilege of addressing the Committee on Veterans' Affairs today. I am proud to say I have fought for this cause since the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress and I am delighted that Chairman Filner and the Committee has made it a top priority this year.

We are here because the Committee is examining H.R. 760, legislation to reward World War II Filipino veterans with full benefits rights under the Department of Veterans Affairs. It cannot happen soon enough. There is a declining population of World War II Filipino veterans and each hero deserves the recognition they earned through blood and sacrifice.

More than 100,000 Filipinos **volunteered** when President Roosevelt issued an Executive Order calling members of the Philippine Commonwealth Army into the service of the United States Armed Forces of the Far East in 1941. Under this order, Filipinos were entitled to full veterans' benefits.

The United States Armed Forces of the Far East fought to reclaim control of the entire Western Pacific. Filipinos, under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, fought on the front lines of the Battle of Corregidor and at Bataan. They served in Okinawa, on occupied mainland Japan, and in Guam. They were part of what became known as the Bataan Death March, and were held and tortured as prisoners of war. Through these hardships, the men of the Philippine Commonwealth Army remained loyal to the United States during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, and the valiant guerrilla war they waged against the Japanese helped delay the Japanese advance across the Pacific.

Despite all of these sacrifices, Congress enacted the Rescission Act of 1946, declaring the service performed by the Philippine Commonwealth Army veterans as not "active service," thus unjustly denying many benefits to which these veterans were rightfully entitled.

For many years, Filipino veterans of World War II, who are now in their seventies and eighties, have sought to correct the injustice caused by the Rescission Act by seeking equal treatment of their valiant military service in our Armed Forces. They stood up to the same aggression that American-born soldiers did, and many Filipinos sacrificed their lives in the war for democracy and liberty.

**Heroes should never be forgotten, so let us not turn our backs on the Filipino veterans who sacrificed so much for our country.** Let us finally pass H.R. 760 and repay all the brave Filipino veterans for their sacrifices by providing them with benefits that are long over due.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman.